FIR TREES AND FIREFLIES

CAROLYN CROSBY WILSON

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FIR TREES AND FIREFLIES

BY

CAROLYN CROSBY (WILSON) Link

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To

HENRY C. LINK

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FIR TREES AND FIREFLIES

MID WINTER

IF I were God, I'd mould hills rolling low,
Smooth them and shape them, sift them
deep with snow,
And scatter them with furze that they might lie
Softly, against the wide deep-tinted sky.
In slow caress my forming hand would linger,
Then a swift finger,
Down some long slope, half carelessly would break
A jagged course for melting snows to take,
The outscooped valley's length they'd run, and
then,
Skirting new hills, go slipping out of ken;
And distanced far, a low-hung sun I'd light,
And paint blue shadows on the rose-touched
white;
Then, wearied, put aside my colours and my clay
And fashion paradise and man on some less
perfect day.

THE PATCHWORK QUILT

HER withered, fluttering hands are still.
Lean closer yet; there is no breath.
The waxy, yellowed brow grows chill,
And we stand futile before death.

Yet say no sermons over her,
Let never stitch on shroud be spent;
These patterned scraps that cover her
Are epitaph and monument.

How often I have seen her gaze,
Knowing how soon she was to go,
Over her chronicle of days
Spelled out in bits of calico.

This blue she knew her eyes would match,
In this white muslin was a bride;
Under this sober chambray patch
Her heart broke when her first-born died.

Stretched quietly upon this bed,
How fitting she should sleep at last
From toe to chin serenely spread
With pleasant patterns of her past.

THE WINDOW

ALL day I wait and stare,
Or drowse with lowered lid;
No passer finds me fair,
Or dreams of beauty hid.

None wonders what I do,
All curtained and discreet;
I am for looking through
Upon the grey-stoned street.

But when the sun stoops low
Each pauses to behold:
"Are you but glass aglow,
Or are you truly gold?"

I frame, when sunset dies,
Hearthfire and candlelight:
"Your lamplit beauty cries
Above the stars of night."

All day I wait and stare,
Or drowse with lowered lid;
No passer finds me fair,
Or dreams of beauty hid.

HOUSELESS

OUR house is built in many streets;
Against full many a garden wall
Our hollyhocks are bright in spring,
Our ivy reddens in the fall.

"These are our poplars, candle-straight."
"And there our green and sloping roof."
"Here from our mammoth chimney swirls
The blue smoke, lazy and aloof."

We smile on gaping stranger folk
Whom we have never seen before,
Who draw our ruffled curtains back,
Or slam our dark and polished door.

Evening and home. We are content,
Whose windows look from many a hill.
These attic stairs are all our own,
Our own this scuffed and hollowed sill.

These four rooms hold, more spaciously
Than staked and mortgaged frontal feet,
Gable and garden, sill and hearth,
Our house that's built in many a street.

ON THE ARROGANCE OF LOVERS

LOVERS have said joy never was begun
Till love was learned; O Chanteclers of bliss,
Was there no glorious rising of the sun
Unlicensed by the summons of your kiss?
Have you not tracked still waters with white foam,
Walked with a brown road to its dusty end,
Heard music, read an uncut book at home,
Or sat before the hearth-fire with a friend?

I am a lover too; yet in my thought
Linger the hundred happy hours I stored
From all the placid years before you brought
This last and crowning treasure to my hoard.
And often I recall, half wistfully,
The morning vigour that's in going free.

ON HEARING SCHUMANN'S "KINDER-SEHNEN"

CHILDREN woven of song,
Thread through delicate thread,
Rose and silver and blue,
But never red.

Dance in decorous ring,
Plead and question and dream,
Follow the phantom sleep,
But never scream.

Child-as-he-ought-to-be,
You in forgotten days,
Dainty and good and clean
Halo and haze.

But never child of your own,
Ruddy of flesh and blood,
Querulous, wicked, beloved,
And smeared with mud.

ROMANCE

THERE is a magic borne of names and places
And things remote, so that their mention cloaks
With a proud glamour distant commonplaces,
Makes personages out of simple folks.
Lycidas, Mignon, Capri, Mangalore,
Palanquin, cuirasse, teakwood, argosy,
Enrich the pageantry of ancient lore,
Unchallenged by their drab reality.

We also are remote; do not tomorrow
And yesterday look quaintly on today?
And could not Jersey's dingy alleys borrow
Rare pavements from some dreamer of Cathay?
Oh, for one hour to shake my tambourine,
Or tip, unmoved, my shining samovar,
That I might guess some beauty in this scene,
Saloon, and ferry boat, and trolley car.

AMANTIUM IRAE

YOU have forgotten that we quarrelled?
You greet me with a casual kiss;
And all the dreary day's despairing
Is nothing to the drab of this.

For every tear you left me shedding
Was rainbowed with expectancy.
The deeper grew the hurt, the sweeter
I dreamed our healing it should be.

But you have come serenely whistling,
Dropping a dutiful caress.
Is life so long we can be wasting
So rare a chance for happiness?

ROADS

ROADS do not run, they only lie,
Each inch beneath its inch of sky
Chained endlessly, although they yearn
To race beyond a tempting turn.
Rain, falling leaves, and grinding wheel
Their patient, upturned faces feel,
Dreaming all day, as dream roads must,
Of unreturning bits of dust.

EPITAPHS FOR YOUNG SINNERS AND OLD SAINTS

I

THIS is our hell, whose love of life was lust,
To lie here choked and manacled by dust,
While careless on the moulded sod above
Sit those who laugh and kiss and talk of love.

II

This is our heaven; to sleep, to sleep, to sleep,
Till spring and sun awake us; then we creep
Up, up to life, stretch, breathe, drink in the rain,
Whiten with frost, and drowse and rot again.

DECEMBER

LAY thy white cloth and light the candles, Winter,
That on thy crystal and thy silver shine;
Too long has the abandoned earth awaited
Such gracious hospitality as thine.

Hiding from echoing streets and empty pastures—
Tempestuous Autumn swept this room so bare—
I heard through shutters drawn thy silent coming,
Flung wide my door and found thy beauty there.

Festoon thy firs and thy red berries cluster,
And tip the flask that spills thine azure wine.
Deep be the draught and mine the lips that draw it
At thy spread table when the toast is thine.

I DUST BOOKS

YOU that are yellowed as letters of old lovers,
Thumb-soiled, and worn as a child's first shoe,
I spin your dusty pages and clap your crumbling covers;
Once the day was dead that held not you.

Then uncut page was hawthorn bud at morning,
Love's word unsaid, and a fresh path's lure.
Then good friend and I were deaf to midnight's warning
Alone beneath the lamp till the dawn was sure.

Old friends, forgive that I whisk across your faces,
Hasty as a stranger, no word said;
Slip you one by one back into your places . . .
Socks must be darned and dinners must be laid.

TO A CHILD IN CHURCH

ERECT and rigid little head
  Dawning above the high-backed pew,
With wispy ringlets haloêd
  And shell ears that the sun shines through,

I know the solemn saucer eyes,
  Which seem with reverence to record
The pompous platitudinous lies
  With which we dare address our Lord;

While yet behind their silent mask
  Your spirit's feet unhampered go
Through fairy forests, or you bask
  In pathless dreams that children know.

And once when we were bent in prayer
  And goodness irked you overmuch,
I saw you toss your thistle hair
  And squirm from the parental clutch.

Our anthems, seeking God on high,
  Echo and die in the dim arch,
While God is in your wicked eye,
  And crumpling up your Sunday starch.

SHOPPING ON FIFTH

VELOUR de laine or duvetyn,
Peachbloom or frost glow, tinseltone?
Or shall I forfeit every one
For vellouise or velveteen?

There's silvercloth without a flaw,
Charmeuse and taffeta—and yet
There's Tricotine and Tricolette,
There's Daphne and there's Dorisoie.

How shall my eyes select a shade
From sapphire, orchid, beige or bisque?
Or shall they further seek and risk
Burnt orange, fuschia, rose or jade?

Prodigal wraps! Must I determine?
Beaver or moleskin, squirrel, mink,
All pleasant things—and yet I think
Chinchilla's softness best, or ermine.

Rugs! See the silky Candahar,
Amritzer, Arak, Savalan,
Sarouk, Serapi, Laristan,
Each lovelier than the last by far.

SHOPPING ON FIFTH

For formal banquet let me see
  My board with creamy Lennox set;
  But when my hearth-fire friends are met,
These Wedgwood bits will grace my tea.

Only some trifles now; these hose,
  Silken, some Rembrandt-ribbed, some clocked;
  A blouse, hand-fagotted or smocked,
And silver shoes with slender toes.

. . . . . .

Enrapt she gazes, strokes and picks.
  Come Cinderella, buy your thread,
  Your gingham and your loaf of bread—
Cars are so crowded after six.

TWO SONGS FOR MY CHILD

I

TO THE BACK OF HIS NECK

I KNOW a honeyed hollow
No other mortal knows,
All gold with fairy grasses
And white with fairy snows;

Sun warm, and fresh as morning,
And silken-sloped and deep,
Wherein, for lips to wake them,
A thousand kisses sleep;

A dear and hidden hollow
Which passing years must needs
Make harsh at last with thistles
And redolent of weeds.

TWO SONGS FOR MY CHILD

II

OTHER CHILDREN

Any grimy urchin now
  Met by chance upon the street,
Glancing up, may wring my heart
  And make my pulses skip a beat.

Have I never seen before
  Twisted limb or overwise,
Soiled and starving spirit peer
  Out of furtive, hungry eyes?

Never cared, until I knew
  You, whom chance has spared each scar
You, who must grow sweet and straight,
  Round and sound as apples are?

Blindness must be bitter crime
  Since such punishment must fall;
Now a child has healed my sight
  I must suffer for them all

LATE MARCH

THE broken back of winter sags
Under the languorous load of spring;
Only the smirched and trodden rags
Of full and dazzling garments cling,
Her splintered voice complains and mutters;
Her maudlin tears flood all the gutters. . . .

Sun, with one merciful, hot breath
Scorch this old, suffering hag to death.

MEETING

TEN minutes more, and the long month is past.
It's at the box office you said we'd meet.
This act would drag for me, however fleet
It went—I never saw a duller caste.
Strange—now the month seems to have gone quite fast
For all its length. I wonder how we'll greet.
Everyone's crying—why does my heart beat
So—right out loud? The curtain—oh, at last!

Is that you? No—or that?—or—no, you're there!
Don't crush my hand—Your lips—Oh I'm quite well.
Come, dear, you can't just stand all day and stare.
No, the sill tripped me. What? Too glad to tell!
Has Broadway grown so bright new-washed with rain?
Or is it just the touch of you again?

THE RETURN, 1918

FLOWERS are on the mantle; in the grate
A new fire crackles; there's a table bright
With bride's new best—silver and spotless white,
Candles rose shaded; for herself a plate
And one for him—no more. A door swings to,
A rush of savory odors in its wake.
She mends some imperceptible mistake
In the board's laying, and checks off anew
"Celery—olives—nuts." The clock's hands crawl.
The child cries faintly in a distant room.
She runs; a mirrored, shy glimpse of her bloom
Runs with her. Then the bell rings in the hall.

At first there is no need of words—caress
Stifles what speech or silence might have been.
And then there is the baby to be seen—
"We'll wake him just this once. Here, Blessedness,

Your Daddy's come. It's not polite to yawn
When formal introduction's taking place.
Well—go to sleep then. Hasn't he a face
To make a cherub jealous? But let's run
Or all our party dinner will be cold."

The first meal in their own home! Gusts of speech,
Gay with inconsequent laughter burst from each,
A thousand trifles to be heard and told.
There is a grateful tribute in his eyes
To her fresh beauty. This hour was his dream
Through many horrors—why then should it seem
A thousand miles between them? Dull surprise
Appalls him—unease at her eager gaze
Seeking him with that bright expectant look
A child gives an unopened fairy book.
Then he is lost again in her quaint ways.

The dishes are all wiped, and every knife
Laid neatly in it's case. His pipe is lit.
The candles have winked softly out. They sit
Before the fire—as any man and wife.
This is the hour for deeper words, but each
Is more than silent, and between them creep
Fears, chill and dark; for in the silence leap

No thoughts that touch and take the place of speech.
Each has gone back to whirlwind brevity
Of wooing and of wedding. How unreal
The mad adventure, and the brave ideal
That would not look beyond itself to see
Two strangers in the firelight, side by side:
"What carefree, wilful children we were then!
And has she changed—or is she still the same?
I wonder if she'll grumble, or be game
When I come home like ordinary men,
Grouchy and tired? Or if I don't provide
The way she likes—and no one waves the flag,
And pulls the good old-fashioned 'hero' gag
That caught her in the first place. Oh, if I'd
Known then all I know now! But it's no go.
There's the boy now to think of. If I'd come
Crippled, or blind, or shell-shocked deaf and dumb
It wouldn't be so hard. At least she'd know
How little I have left in me to give—
But when it's only that my mind's a hell
Of bloody pictures that I couldn't tell
And can't forget.—They shouldn't let men live
With things like that behind. Or if I must—
And if my brokenness must have a mate—
Then one of those wrecked girls of France that wait

In shamed despair for lovers that are dust.
At least, while we sat silent, hand in hand
Our dark thoughts could go stumbling. But this child
Who never saw pain—she is half defiled
By my mere thought. She'll never understand.
Why—it's a wonder that she hasn't yet
Plucked at my sleeve and gaily prompted me
To 'tell her all about it'—that will be
The worst of all.—If I could just forget!"
She touches him, "It's come!" He sets his jaw
Before he can look down to her. Her look
No longer seeks him as a fairy book.
There is a hope there that he never saw
In any eyes—a light that cleanses him.
"When the boy came, death was so near that pain
And I were friends, since pain meant life again.
You have been nearer death, known hours more grim,
Braved greater things, but some day—if you can—
Tell me—and I will understand, I think.
And if I share it with you and don't shrink
Then it might help a little. There's no man
Strong enough to remember all alone."

The great sobs wrack him, and the fear and
care
Slide from him—with light hands she smooths
his hair,
And the room glows—though all the fire is
gone.

NIAGARA

PICNIC papers and iron rails, smoke smudged
sky and a captured beast,
Lithe and terrible, angry voiced; gaud bedecked
and snowy fleeced.
Cheap, small people come by night; mock hom-
age bringing, they stand and stare
Vacant eyed at the insolent glare of calcium lights
on foam-pure hair,
While a listless moon hangs pale in air.

Snapping the shutters of Brownie 2's, have you
no fear, you smug and good,
Fear of a captive's regal strength docilely making
your breakfast food?

THOUGHTS IN AN ART GALLERY

I

ON SILENCE

I PAD along the swept and polished floor,
Stealthy and rubber-heeled; I meet and spy
One not so fortunately heeled as I,
Who teeters on his toes and creaks the more.
We eye each other slantwise and pass by.

I meet a friend; our whispered greeting stirs
No echo in the pale impartial glare
That skylights shed in corners bleakly bare.
I go my noiseless way and she goes hers.
If I should scream, would anybody care?

This agony of silence, does it aid
The straining sight? Do weird, relentless looms
Fashion the unseen web that stills these rooms?

Or are the cluttering sounds that man has made
Swept out each day before industrious brooms?

Shall I be bound by such a senseless spell?
  Once and for all this vacuum I'll shatter.
  I'll scuff my feet and chortle as I chatter.
I'll end the thing with one ear-splitting yell.
  Brass buttons gleam and I debate the matter.

The stern attendant notes my furtive ways;
  No studied nonchalance can him deceive.
  He knows I fear him; and I half believe,
Slinking away from his accusing gaze,
  I *have* a Mona Lisa up my sleeve.

II

ON BEGINNINGS

I round a corner; all agog I stand;
Washington crosses here the Delaware.
And these phenomena confront my stare,
"Paul and Virginia" and "The Helping Hand."
Originals? I never thought they *were*.

I somehow thought—when I have thought at all—
They spread amœba-like. With pained regret
I see my life's convictions all upset.
It's just like coming in an empty hall
On the grand-uncle of the Alphabet.

III

ON BEAUTY

Pink, pulpy Cupids; Psyches all too nude;
  Smug, sallow saints; sunsets of cotton wool;
  Acres of canvas for one prisoned bull;
Madonnas that eternally force food
  On babes already obviously full.

Wall after wall, with sinking heart I scan
  The stuffy, tarnished canvases I hate,
  Then find obscured (the hour is growing late)
The clear lines and fresh tintings of a man
  Too far from putrefaction to be great.

By what perversion do we worship them,
  Cupid and saint, the bovine in its stall?
  Dared we the truth, who would not burn them
      all
And set that thing of beauty like a gem
  To glow unrivalled on the sombre wall?

IV

ON EXHIBITIONS

The newest school? Creation re-created—
  All forms and colours known to heaven or earth
  In chaos far too terrible for mirth.
Art's Bolshevism. Or have I underrated?
  Is this indeed the agony of birth?

THE FUNERAL

WHEN I am dead
Lay me not straitly in a lidded bed,
A dark cell, satin walled—
(Satin has always set my nerves on edge.)
Heap me not with the heavy-scented pledge
Of pallid lilies, freesias' waxy bloom—
Narcissus (Always in a room
Their breath has sickened me.)

Let not my friends be called
(And others who have never been my friends)
To crowd, uneasy, in a close, hushed gloom
Of shutters which outprison sun and breezes
While in the corner where he has been shoved,
Suave and black gloved
And glad,
The undertaker servilely attends,
And one I hardly knew
Pays tribute to the things I did not do,
Chants comfort with a solemn-voiced appeal,
For grief, he says, that no one ought to feel.

For restlessly, I'll tickle a child's nose until he
sneezes
And if the music's strain be slow and drear
I'll break the wailing voice of one who sings,
And snap maliciously the viol's strings.
Low in the ear
Of one who was most near
I'll whisper whimsies not to be withstood,
Till a shrill giggle, sending tension slack,
Pulls it so swiftly taut it waits to crack.
Those who have loved me not
I'll smile to hear,
In a dry agony,
Strangely embarrassed, praying for a tear;
But the red eyes of those whom I held dear
Shall shame themselves—and me.

Rattle me not, a grim procession's head,
On rough roads to the still, green covered plot
Where the dead
Lie and rot.
When I am dead
Give me the kind, swift flames to set me free,
And in the empty room I leave behind,
In the spilled sun set roses red,
And let a lazy wind
Drift the light curtains gladly
To and fro.

THE FUNERAL

Though,
If I should be elected
To be dissected,
I should be interested and proud.
Oh! anything is better than monuments erected
To a shroud.

CONFIDANTE

I WHO walk in the dark,
Alone beyond all knowing,
Must watch to-night
Glad, sheltered light
In strangers' windows glowing.

Unto me, hungering
With unfulfilled desires,
The keen wind brings
Warm scent of things
That brew by strangers' fires.

I find my darkened house,
Silent and all alone,
And my sup of bread
That is dry and dead,
And no candle save mine own.

INTRUSION

THE very soul of beauty I had caught
In my two hands, a shimmering, fluttering thing,
I worshipped, wondering
What words of mine should form its bands,
Matching and weighing, polishing
Each phrase, to string
Upon a silver thought.

A knock upon my door,
And I stretched out my hand to greet
A friend, and so released my captive: fleet
As breath it fled and will return no more.

Dear friend—I love you—but
Why did you come
Just then into my room?

EVENING

WHEN Evening first, rising from day-long rest,
Cups her slow hands 'round Day's too dazzling light,
Still through her fingers slips a radiance bright,
Reddening and spreading in the darkening west.
She sighs, and through the fragrant dusk the breeze
Makes whispered music in the quivering trees.
Then strengthening Night snuffs out the Day's last spark,
And sets the first star shimmering in the dark.

DAWN

AT the feet of his lady the moon
Lies the night,
Aquiver and breathless and bright
With the light
Of her smile on his face
And the shadows her slim fingers trace.
And now she is gone and he lies
Black browed and brooding and still,
And over the hill
From afar
The clear morning star
Burns but to set him athrill.
But the night steals away,
Seeking his lady, and leaves the star, paling, to day.

LOVE ON A PEDESTAL

INTO your arms you have taken
A dream that is not I.
The lips you have kissed are the lips of a wraith;
To a shadow love you have pledged your faith
While my heart's heart must stand by.

HIDE AND SEEK

I KNOW the taste of love on the lips;
I know the touch of love, on the hair;
And the feel of love to the finger tips:
Love, are you there?

I know the look of love in the eyes:
I know the sound of love to the ear:
And the pulse of love in the heart's quick rise:
Love, are you here?

Find me not full in the arm's embrace,
Hint of me here and sense of me there—
But in answered thought, in the silences
And the dreams you share.

LOVE SONGS

I

THERE are some things too wonderful to tell:
Sunset, red-gold across a waveless sea,
From pool to pool a glen-stream's revelry,
The morning star's pale fire and breathless spell,
And so I cannot say how wonderful you are.

There are some things too beautiful to know:
The silver song the shimmering planets sing,
What the tall, bending birch is whispering,
How sunlight kisses the sky buds ablow,
So I can only guess your beauty from afar.

II

Am I like a lily?
  Am I like a rose?
You are like the white birch
  When no wind blows.

Am I like the sunset?
  Am I like the dawn?
You are like the crescent moon,
  And day scarce gone.

Has your love no end?
  Has your love no let?
My love is like the air you breathe,
  Which you forget.

My love is like the earth
  You cannot choose but tread,
Which still would hold you close
  Though you lay dead.

III

Oh, I have kissed the feet of hills
  That were blue sisters to the sky.
But what care hills that speak with clouds
  For such as I?

Yet I have seen the hills look up
  In endless yearning to some star
That walked the heavens, aloof and proud,
  As such things are.

And I have sorrowed for the hills;
  Stars will not answer their desire,
Or swerve to brush the highest peak's
  Upstraining spire.

But love is mine and I have known
  More unimagined, breathless bliss,
Than had the hills I loved erewhile
  Stooped to my kiss.

HAUNTED

MOONLIGHT gleams on the roofs like rain,
Moon light sleeps on the streets like snow,
Moonlight stifles my heart with pain
Wherever I go.

Night, unfolding great lucent wings,
Flower that blooms without sound or stir,
Fill not my heart with ghosts of things
That never were.

MOTILS

IN OTHER SPRINGS

IN other springs, before I knew your love,
Skies were as blue, as fragrant new cut grass;
And furred hepaticas have come to pass
With equal wonder, leaf-hid, in a grove.
The dawn has crept as silently to know
If bird songs would outlive her quaint surprise.
And yet, with this new magic on my eyes,
I can but marvel if it has been so.

But this stills question; since at last I learn
Colour afresh, music of wind and rain,
Curve of a hill, call of a sky-ceiled lane,
My ancient blindness never can return.
May I not live to see, to touch, to hear
What love has taught me, and not know you
near.

A DRAUGHT SO PRECIOUS

A DRAUGHT so precious you have offered me
I dare not lift it now and take my fill,
Lest I should prove to drink unworthily,
I touch not the brimmed goblet, lest it spill.
And yet you tempt me, holding patiently
The ruddy potion, pleading with me still
To drink, since you must bear eternally
What none save I may taste, who never will.

Nothing you ask of me? Then understand
That one day you will seek me thirstily,
Begging a single drop, and I would see
The wind sip dry the wine cup in your hand,
Rather than know my heart some day must
break
To see you die of thirst I cannot slake.

YOUR LOVE HAS COME BETWEEN US LIKE A BAR

YOUR love has come between us like a bar;
Your fire has burned away our old content;
And I can find no laughter where you are,
Since lips were made for more than merriment.
We found still beauty in a quiet star
When once upon dear, friendly ways we went;
Now stumbling words such still communions mar,
And silence hurts the heart when words are spent.

Once the quick, comrade pressure of my hand
Told you my thought; yet now I dare not move
To silent language, lest you understand
More than I ever meant: Oh, what is love
That steals a flower and leaves a restless fire
And friends divided by a keen desire?

ONCE WHEN WE STOOD TOGETHER ON A HILL

ONCE when we stood together on a hill,
And beauty faced us in the fresh surprise
Of green fields among gold, autumn's deep skies,
And purple, answering hills, I took my fill
Of nature's outspread feast, and we were still,
I worshipping the earth's long swell and rise
—I had not then found heaven in your eyes—
You in desire, unmoving and athrill.

And then a voice not mine spoke in my heart,
And fearing it, I turned to meet your look
That was not on the hills. Swiftly I shook
Myself to banal speech. I saw you start
As I had called you from a sacrament.
You answered hoarsely, and we turned and went.

I FOUND NO BEAUTY IN ME TILL YOU CAME

I FOUND no beauty in me till you came,
And then I only wondered, sometimes, why
After brief looks, you turned away your eye,
Hinting at speech your dumb lips could not frame,
Until you told me, whispering a sweet name,
How all the beauty in the world was I,
And that your glance upon me was so shy,
Loth to be seared in too-much-beauty's flame.

Now I go proudly, with new dignity,
And now I linger sometimes at my glass.
For all night's stars are in my midnight hair,
And in my dark eyes all night's mystery.
So that I smile to see the people pass
Who never guess the beauty that I bear.

THERE WAS A DAY I COULD NOT FIND YOU, DEAR

THERE was a day I could not find you, dear,
Something within my very self went blind.
I sought you in the sunshine, in the wind—
I sought you in my heart—you were not here.
And from your picture, suddenly austere,
Reproachful eyes looked on me, to remind
Me of our bond; your letters seemed but kind
And pale, reread, and I grew dumb with fear.

Till every doubt that ever touched your name
Came creeping coldly to me, with a chill—
"Can this be love that now its way retraces
From fire to ice?" Then suddenly you came,
And through my heart I felt the answer thrill:
"There is no heaven but hath its silent spaces."

WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED

WHO would have guessed four words, so quickly said,
Could raise this wall between us? I, who knew
Each thought of yours, look silently at you
And only know some precious thing for dead.
I wonder at your still, averted head,
Your listless hands, grope for a word or two,
And ponder, aching, if the thing be true
I told you, or the thing you answeréd.

And when you go, night closes swiftly in,
Sleepless and sob-wracked, with no memory
Of any beauty; and strange forms begin
To whisper death the only path for me.
For in this dark and doorless room of sorrow
Is no dear past, and no fresh-eyed tomorrow.

"YOU ARE MY DREAM," YOU SAID

"YOU are my dream," you said; and in my hand,
Trusting me silently, you laid the key
Of all you were and all you hoped to be.
And I smiled up and tried to understand
How you were mine to shape and to command.
I took your thousand kisses wonderingly
And hid them in my heart where none might see,
Then of my heart made voiceless, fierce demand.

Finding no answer there, you forth I sent
And locked you out from me,—and yet not quite.
Your anguish wrung my spirit when you went
And I could feel you groping in the night,
Till sudden knowledge shook me from my pain.
I opened wide and called you back again.

WHEN I HAVE FOLLOWED DAY-LONG, DUSTY WAYS

WHEN I have followed day-long, dusty ways,
Dull lakes have tempted me, and streams unsure,
Dark pools, too weedy-shallow to be pure.
But thirst-companioned have I trod my days.
Half, only cautious, half as one who plays
Self-enemied, I said: "I will endure
Until day's end has brought the perfect cure,
And conquer thirst, though merciless he flays."

And I have come at last with whole desire
To quenching draughts of unguessed purity.
I know the joy of souls set swiftly free
After long torture of slow eating fire.
So have I kept my heart's long thirst; Oh friend
You are my brimming cup, my journey's end!

IMPERFECTION

YOU are not perfect. Who am I to ask
To see all good reflected in your face?
Who sets a candle in the heaven's wide space?
And who mates beauty's self with beauty's mask?
Had you fulfilled your each appointed task,
And steady walked each way you had to trace,
And had you won unfaltering every race,
What nectar had you found in my faint flask?

Nay, for our imperfections rather, love
Has made us one, that I to you might give,
And you to me; and that we thus might live,
Each helping other; living thus might prove
That double imperfection, striving up
May kiss at last perfection's brimming cup.

WERE YOU BUT HERE, COMPANION OF MY HEART

WERE you but here, companion of my heart,
To see that hill, beyond dark tree tops set,
Dim slowly to mysterious violet,
Or with a passing cloud to pale gold start—
Could you but watch the ever-changing art
Of cloud flocks, flushing, paling, without let,
And pines that lift their quivering heads to get
The last gold drop e'er earth and sun must part—

Were you but here, oh dreamer of my dreams,
(Even the free wind worships and is still)
Were you but here, and by my side might sit
(I learned all beauty from your lips, it seems)
Wordless, I'd point you to that changing hill.
But you, I think, would never look at it.

ONE DAY I GAVE YOU AN OLD MEMORY

ONE day I gave you an old memory
Of horror, that unstilled by night or day,
Kept pace with me and would not go away,
Chilling me in dim places stealthily,
Tainting my sunshine, leering close at me,
Stalking my dreams, halting me from my play:
Horror that choked me till I could not pray,
Horror that hugged me till I could not see.

And speaking I had turned aside my head,
Lest It should come between us. My tongue drew
The words slow-footed from my heart. Half-said
You stopped my tale, and turned my face to you.
"And then?" you said. But memory had gone
And you and love and I stood all alone.

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE TOUCHED LOVE'S BOUNDARY

HOW often have we touched love's boundary—
Or so our untaught spirits made us guess—
Greater, we said, there is no happiness;
Here is love's pinnacle, and here are we,
Perfect in love, from all save love set free;
No need to question or to answer "yes"
—Tongues need not say what meeting lips confess—
In this our moment of high ecstasy.

Yet some but half-heard word, some swift met thought
Has opened wide another unguessed door
And what seemed happiness to us before
Pales in this unconceivêd joy to naught.
Each moment only is supreme to prove
The coming of a fuller hour of love.

HURT NOT MY HEART WITH TOO MUCH BEAUTY, NIGHT

HURT not my heart with too much beauty, night,
Asleep along the moon-gold fields of snow
That, rising like a pale, vast ocean, flow
To the hill's crest, poised, lustreful, and white,
Breathless restoring the serene stars' light.
Move, ocean, masted with tall stems that throw
Tense, sharp-cut shadows, dark with indigo.
Break, silent wave, or break my heart, delight.

Merciless beauty, may this half-heart dare
Thy instant presence? Must I watch alone
Thy face unveiled? Then, since thou wilt not spare,
Give me my heart's completion in that one
Whose coming stills thy ache and gives me peace
To bear thy wonder's thousandfold increase.

SINCE WORDS ARE NOT

YOU, since no arms could hold, no lips could press
Close as our close-knit spirits, which are one,
Halted the fierce embrace you had begun,
Held me half-near, kissed me with gentleness;
Yet wakened with your flower-light caress
Joy that did former rapture all outrun.
Here source-fire of the quiet lying sun,
Here strength of silent sea tides, I could guess.

And I, since words are not that can reveal
Half the heart-shaking wonder that I feel,
Give you no answer, asking love of me,
But eyes unveiled, lips that move silently.
All youth, all love, all life were made for this,
The wordless moment of the spirit's kiss.

WHAT WITHOUT LAUGHTER WERE OUR LOVE TODAY?

WHAT without laughter were our love today?
There was a time when weariness had stirred
Unclear my vision, some unguarded word
Had all but set me under anger's sway.
And then your eyes caught mine, and seemed to say,
"What? Thought so little trouble to have blurred
Our so great love? Well, isn't that absurd?"
Mirth, like a fresh wind, drove the mists away.

And once, when love had grown too fiercely sweet
Almost for bearing, yet all life were vain,
Clear of your arms, free of the hot swift rain
Of your dear kisses, I was brave to meet
Your glance, and share with you the glad surprise
Of saving laughter answering my eyes.

ONE LACK I HAVE

ONE lack I have, one dream not satisfied,
(And will it ever be?) to make you know
What never silence, speech, caress can show,
The depths of love which once I sought to hide,
Now grown so great that like a rising tide,
Thwarted, they beat upon me with their flow
Of ecstasy, and every day I go
Seeking some key to set my flood gates wide.

Yet in my heart, I know that this is best;
Love grows not dull that still is love in quest.
That want is dearest that finds scanty food,
And love were little were it understood.
Our souls would shrivel in us could we dare
Full, sudden sight of all the love we bear.

WAS EVER LOVE SO WONDERFUL AS THIS?

WAS ever love so wonderful as this?
Do others in so sober a disguise
Walk golden pavements under sapphire skies,
Drunk with unspoken words, elate with bliss?
Has self so lost itself in any kiss?
Stars answered so to stars in shining eyes?
Or in such blithe forgetting to be wise
Have others scorned love's least delight to miss?

Lovers half-seen in spring-enchanted park,
Drawn each to eager each in the kind dark;
Illumined faces glimpsed, and hardly-heard,
Tense voices breaking on a low-pitched word
Have waked my jealous wonder. Has this band
Loved as we love, and do they understand?

TODAY THE RIVERS IN THE STREETS RAN BLUE

TODAY the rivers in the streets ran blue,
Tumultuous mirrors of too wide a sky.
And in the parks, where shade is wont to lie,
Snow's azure kindled to a blinding hue.
Tonight in gold, diminished curves anew,
Lamps woke to mock the white faced moon on high:
Spires yearned to heaven, heaven touched them in reply,
And my heart raced across the miles to you.

Here in this room, where door and blind remain
To shut out beauty, and you cannot be,
Exultant knowledge stops to comfort me:
Beauty stays not, but changing, comes again,
And years in scores are still for us to share,
Brushed by her fingers, dazzled by her hair.

SOMETIMES WHEN THROUGH RESOUNDING STREETS WE GO

SOMETIMES when through resounding streets we go,
In the dense shelter of a restless crowd,
Love in your eyes cries out to me aloud,
And love in mine calls back; sudden and low,
Your voice puts cheek and pulses in fierce glow,
And half abashed, while yet so wholly proud,
I fancy, though my head be swiftly bowed,
All see and guess—yet less surmise than know.

Oh, do they know? Or do they only rush,
Earth chained, upon their unillumined way?
Dusty gold-getters, I will make you wise.
Square your limp shoulders, lift your wrinkled eyes,
Learn by my quickened pace, my hidden flush,
How near you were to joy's hot heart today.

WITH WHAT DULL DRUGS

WITH what dull drugs do I conspire to still
My heart that cries for you incessantly:
Drowned in the clacking keys' monotony,
Stabbed by a pen, crushed in the ruthless mill
Of sleep and eat and work and eat, until
I seem almost to have the mastery
Of my fierce want, and you become to me
An image lost like sun behind a hill.

One note of music's delicate suspense,
A lilac cloud ending my avenue,
A child's brown hand, a lover's voice, a verse,
Wrecks suddenly my slowly wrought defense,
And once again I face my dearest curse,
The priceless agony of wanting you.

LOVE CANNOT BE BELIEVED

LOVE cannot be believed, but must too much
Be said and said again; we grope our way
Only by what our eyes and lips may say;
And though these promise, hands reach out with such
Piteous entreaty, with such straining clutch
Tell their white-knuckled tale. Why do we pay
Love's lodging, all too wisely, day by day?
Faith, stand alone, and toss aside your crutch!

Be our white, steadfast star, a lover's song
Hummed in our hearts; and we will watch serene
Fate fling her little oceans in between,
Glad and secure in love; though we may long
With longing we have yet to understand,
For eyes and lips and the out-yearning hand.

I AM AT REST IN YOU

I AM at rest in you as housetops drowned
In mistless moonlight, when no wind creeps free
To blur one leaf's rapt, silver ecstasy.
I am at peace as petals that have found
Their falling sweet and haven on the ground.
I am at peace in you. Then suddenly
Storm breaks; flame sears; winds scourge; all love in me
Flares to the fury, splendid, fierce, unbound.

I am ablaze with you; the lightning darts,
Quivers, and cleaves the heaped, tumultuous sky;
Flame leaps to meet it, and that flame is I.
And this mad conflagration our two hearts.
But storms will pass, blue skies again be gay,
And we two children on a sunny day.

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